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ABSTRACT

A system was developed to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of transition services for special education students in Maine. The project's three phases included preliminary activities relevant to the development of the evaluation system; activities in developing, field testing, and revising the evaluation strategy; and selecting and evaluating the transition programs. Twenty-one of the 123 school districts in Maine participated. The system was designed to allow the state education agency to conduct further longitudinal study and to track the progress of individuals receiving transition services. The study contributed the following major findings, among others: (1) a significant number of local education agencies are not addressing transition needs in a formalized way; (2) successful transition programming shares some components with special education, such as referral and assessment, interagency collaboration, use of functional curricula, and active participation of parents and students; and (3) components unique to transition programs are not as successfully implemented, including community involvement, quantity and quality of job placements, student follow-up, postsecondary educational placements, and adjustment to community living. This executive summary contains a description of the project, methods and procedures used, results and discussion, recommendations, and a 46-item bibliography. (JDD)

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ED320359

TRANSITION PROGRAMS FOR THE HANDICAPPED: IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL SERVICES
AND THE
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATE OF MAINE

Division of Special Education
Department of Educational and Cultural Services
State House Station 23
Augusta, Maine 04333

EC 231173

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TRANSITION PROGRAMS
FOR THE HANDICAPPED:
IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project conducted pursuant to
Cooperative Agreement # G0085C3511

State of Maine
Department of Educational and Cultural Services
and the
Office of Special Education Programs
United States Department of Education

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This program evaluation project was developed by the State of Maine, Department of Educational and Cultural Services, Division of Special Education with technical assistance from Associates in Professional Technologies, Inc. Dr. Richard Bartlett was the project director, and Dr. Louis Ando was the project coordinator.

A comprehensive system was developed for the evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of transition services for special education students. The field testing of the evaluation system was made possible through the hard work and cooperation of the Brunswick School District, Brunswick; the Mount Desert Island Union #98, Bar Harbor; and the VanBuren SAD #24, VanBuren, Maine.

Fifty school districts and private secondary schools have received training through this cooperative agreement. Data from a broad sample of 21 districts and private schools were aggregated to provide statewide answers to the questions posed by this project.

Federal support in the form of a cooperative agreement from the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs made this evaluation project possible. The project officer from the Office of Special Education Programs was Susan Sanchez.

Project staff would like to thank the members of the Stakeholder Committee who worked diligently to ensure that the project addressed the transition needs of all handicapped children. Appreciation is also extended to the LEAs who participated in the project by conducting local evaluations.

Finally, project staff would like to offer our special thanks to Eve M. Bither, Commissioner, Department of Education and Cultural Services and to David Noble Stockford, Director of the Division of Special Education for their support in encouraging this project to go forward and for their interest in the transition of Maine's children from school to the world of work and community living.

ABSTRACT

Although there has been interest in the transition of handicapped children from school to work environments for some time, there have been very little data collected which would assist in the development or improvement of these transition programs. To address this need, a program evaluation project was developed by the State of Maine, Department of Educational and Cultural Services, Division of Special Education with technical assistance from Associates in Professional Technologies, Inc. Federal support in the form of a cooperative agreement from the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs made this evaluation project possible.

A comprehensive system was developed to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of transition services for special education students. The field testing of the evaluation system occurred in the Brunswick School District, Brunswick; the Mount Desert Island Union #98, Bar Harbor; and the VanBuren SAD #24, VanBuren, Maine.

The project activities were separated into three primary phases.

Project Phases

PHASE I: Preliminary activities relevant to the development of an evaluation system

PHASE II: Activities relevant to the development, field test and revision of the evaluation strategy.

PHASE III: Selection and evaluation of transition programs.

Phase I and Phase II can be seen as preliminary activities to the primary purpose of this project. Phase III includes the activities comprising the actual statewide evaluation.

Twenty-one of the 123 districts in the state included program evaluation as an immediate priority and were able to participate in the present evaluation project. This sample represents 18% of the total of LEAs and was representative of the state as a whole.

Data from these districts and private schools were aggregated to provide statewide answers to the questions posed by this project. The participants were geographically distributed throughout the state. The project has contributed to Maine's efforts in

transition by providing a comprehensive report of the impact and effectiveness of transition services programs throughout the state of Maine. The goals of transition that are relevant and important within the state of Maine have been identified. Areas of needed technical assistance have been identified, and the SEA will be able to target these areas by providing the necessary assistance. An evaluation system has been developed which will allow the SEA to conduct further longitudinal study in order to monitor the improvement of transition programs. A tracking system has been created to enable the progress of individuals receiving transition services to be monitored more easily.

This study has contributed the following major findings:

1. The goals of transition that are relevant and important within the state of Maine have been identified.

2. An evaluation system and instrumentation has been developed which will allow longitudinal analysis of program progress.

3. A significant number of LEAs in the state are not addressing transition needs in a formalized way. In addition, the terminology is not standardized, and agreement is lacking as to the exact responsibility of the schools.

4. Those program components that have been developed as part of the special education initiative seem to be successful in transition programs. These include referral and assessment practices, interagency collaboration, use of functional curricula, and active participation of parents and students.

5. Program components that are unique to transition programs such as community involvement, quantity and quality of job placements, student follow-up, post-secondary educational placements, and adjustment to community living were not as successfully implemented.

6. Formalized policy was significantly absent in the review of transition programs. Procedures were in place for those activities stated in (4) above.

7. Neither policy nor procedures were significantly present for program components which address community involvement, quantity and quality of job placements, student follow-up, post-

secondary educational placements, and adjustment to community living.

8. In relation to type of handicap, the data resulting from this study indicate wide variation across areas of specialty. However, due to the small number of respondents in some groups, meaningful interpretation of these data is not practical.

9. When former students' employment histories were examined, quality and quantity of job opportunities seemed limited though generally consistent with regional characteristics.

10. Students who had graduated reported the need for more post-secondary training and educational opportunities and that the majority of their job referrals came through family and friends.

11. While there is much scatter between the level of achievement of specific goals among individual districts, there was no discernible pattern as a result of administrative structure.

12. In those cases where performance was weakest as determined by surveys and instruments, there tended not to be regularly implemented policies or procedures.

13. Regarding the identification of effective districts, it seems that those LEAs with successful programs have formalized policies and procedures which address each of the goals of transition. A direct relationship between program quality and the existence of regularly implemented policy and procedures was found.

The following recommendations address the project findings:

1. An intensive inservice program for LEA personnel is required to provide a common base of knowledge regarding the role of the schools in transition programming.

2. The SEA should establish a compendium of recommended LEA policies and procedures which address each goal of transition. LEAs could modify these as necessary. Particular attention should be given to those goals that are unique to transition. Further, attention should be given to the formal integration of transition

policies and procedures within the special education program.

3. It is imperative that LEA plans be developed to increase the quality and quantity of job opportunities for special education students who have graduated from school. This should be a major initiative for SEA technical assistance.

4. It is equally essential that a plan be developed to increase the availability of post-secondary educational opportunities for special education students.

5. The SEA should develop a plan to identify and publicize promising practices in transition programming.

6. There is also the need for coordination of efforts at the state and local levels to bring cohesion to the development of the transition initiative.

7. The SEA should encourage LEAs to use P.L.94-142 funds to supplement the development of transition programs by funding program components that have not been included in the local budget.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Parents, educators, and rehabilitation professionals have become increasingly concerned about the future of handicapped students who graduate or leave school programs. Many of these young people leave school hoping to find employment and are often frustrated by their inability to find work or the quality of the work which they obtain. The United States Commission on Civil Rights (1983) reported that unemployment rates among handicapped individuals are much higher than among nonhandicapped individuals. Further, 50% to 75% of adult handicapped workers are unemployed (Hasazi, Gordon, and Roe, 1985).

Based on the philosophy that the purpose of any education is to prepare children for self-fulfilling contribution to society, the real effectiveness of special programming lies in its ability to prepare children for success through programs that will result in the development of usable, marketable skills. Effective transitional programs are essential to meeting this end.

The traditional view of transition concentrates heavily upon the linking of services between school and adult opportunities. Will (1984) states that this view is no longer sufficient, commenting that "The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations" (p.1).

The purpose of this evaluation project was to assess the extent to which transition programs in Maine assist students in their transition from school to the world of work. The evaluation results serve a variety of purposes. A determination has been made as to the success of the programs currently in place. Because of the self-evaluation strategy employed, LEAs may use evaluation results to construct management plans that will result in program improvement. Areas of needed technical assistance to be provided by the SEA were identified. Finally, a product of this project was the development of a survey to facilitate the tracking of individuals in the transition systems.

The project activities were separated into three primary phases. The following description of the project phases will provide the reader with an overview of the evaluation.

Project Phases

PHASE I: Preliminary activities relevant to the development of an evaluation system for transition programs. Specific activities included:

1. Selection of a Stakeholder Committee to serve as an active advisory board by overseeing project activities and assisting in the interpretation of results.

   1.1 Representatives of the following groups made up the committee:

   Parents, LEA staff, project staff, representatives of the state advisory panel members of local private industrial council, representatives of collaborating agencies, prospective employers, SEA representatives, community resource personnel, representatives from the Directors of Special Education Association in Maine.

   1.2 Individuals to serve on the Stakeholder Committee were nominated by members of the present Secondary Transition Committee.

   1.3 The Stakeholder Committee was formed in December, 1985 and held one meeting prior to project initiation. This meeting was to clarify ideas and review goals and objectives.

2. Development of goal-based strategy to evaluate transition programs.

   2.1 Verification of process and product goals and objectives for transition programs. Acting as a recommending body, the Stakeholder Committee was asked to react to the goals and objectives.

   2.2 Project staff and the Stakeholder group reviewed the evaluation questions to ensure that identified goals and objectives were addressed.

3. Project staff then identified the most appropriate sources of information for each of

the evaluation questions. In all cases similar evaluation questions were addressed through two or more sources in order to increase validity.

PHASE II: Activities relevant to the development, field test and revision of the evaluation strategy.

1. Development of instrumentation and a manual for conducting the evaluation was accomplished during this phase. Once respondent groups and evaluation questions were identified, specific instruments were developed. A manual of methods and procedures was also created.

2. Three LEA sites were selected for the field test. Representatives of the LEAs were trained in the use of the instruments and the procedures.

3. Based upon the results of the field test, modifications were made in the manual and instruments.

4. Final preparation of the evaluation instruments and procedures was completed.

PHASE III: Evaluation of transition programs.

1. The revised evaluation methodology was applied to a representative sample of transition programs in a total of 21 LEAs. This was a self-evaluation with technical assistance from project staff.

2. LEA data were aggregated and analyzed to determine the impact and effectiveness of transition programs on a statewide basis.

3. A final report was written to address the impact of transition programs, and a statewide management plan was developed. The state and federal implications of the findings were also addressed.

Phase I and Phase II can be seen as preliminary activities to the primary purpose of this project. Phase III includes the activities that constitute the actual statewide evaluation.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Phase I

Before Phase I was initiated, a statewide survey was conducted to determine the status of transition programs in the state of Maine. Surveys were distributed to 126 LEAs with 77 returned. Follow-up of nonrespondents indicated that many of the individuals from these districts felt that transition programs in their districts were not well enough established to provide relevant information.

The majority of the responding LEAs were classified as rural (67%). A mean of 523 students were enrolled in the programs in each district, and an average of 4.2 (F.T.E.) staff were involved in the provision of services.

In summary, the data indicate that transition services are offered in an inconsistent manner. However, it is apparent that programs are present and functional in the majority of districts.

With this assessment of the status of programs completed, the project entered Phase I. The activities in this phase primarily concerned the identification of relevant goals and objectives which would frame the evaluation. The first activity was the selection of a Stakeholder Committee to serve as an active advisory board. The charge of the committee was to assist in the identification of goals and objectives and to review potential methods and procedures. The committee members are listed in the acknowledgments section of this report.

The Stakeholder committee identified the primary goals of transition programs in the state of Maine. This was accomplished through a number of steps. First, committee members, representing their constituent groups, proposed goals that each felt was important. Project staff consolidated these, eliminated duplicates, and phrased them in a consistent style. The committee then met to review and reach a consensus about the appropriateness of each goal. Once goals had been identified, project staff developed objectives and evaluation questions. The Stakeholder Committee was asked to consider the relevance of each of these. A set of clear expectations for transition programs resulted from this activity.

The following goals and evaluation questions were developed:

Goal 1: Transition programs provide timely referral and appropriate placement consistent with student needs.

1.1. Do referral procedures ensure timely assessment?
1.2. Do referral procedures ensure appropriate placement?

Goal 2: Assessment practices are comprehensive and appropriate.

2.1. Are pre-vocational assessment procedures appropriate?
2.2. Are vocational assessment procedures appropriate?
2.3. Is information from pre-vocational assessments used when appropriate?
2.4. Is information from vocational assessments used when appropriate?
2.5. Is pre-vocational assessment available to all handicapped students?
2.6. Is vocational assessment available to all handicapped students?

Goal 3: Transition programs involve interagency collaboration in order to maximize program effectiveness.

3.1. Are service agencies involved in transition programming for handicapped students?

3.2. Is there an appropriate referral procedure between the school and service agencies?

Goal 4: Transition programs provide vocational and pre-vocational training through functional curricula.

4.1. Do vocational and pre-vocational programs follow a continuum of services?
4.2. Do P.E.T.s develop individual goals that reflect pre-vocational and vocational assessments?
4.3. Do transition programs implement appropriate training alternatives identified by the P.E.T.?
4.4. Do a range of environments exist to support each student's training needs?
4.5. Are functional curricula provided in appropriate areas?

4.6. Is the opportunity for realistic career exploration provided through course work?

Goal 5: Transition programs encourage active parent involvement.

5.1. Do parents help to determine the overall transition program for their child?
5.2. Do parents participate in a continuous review of the child's program?
5.3. Are parents informed about the progress of the program?
5.4. Are parents involved in the modification of the program?

Goal 6: Transition programs encourage active student involvement.

6.1. Are students involved in determining their transition program?
6.2. Do students participate in a continuous review of their program?
6.3. Are students involved in the modification of the program?

Goal 7: Transition programs encourage active community involvement.

7.1. Are community advisory panels established?
7.2. Do community advisory committees provide direct assistance to students in transition?
7.3. Are business enclaves established for students who require moderate support during placement?
7.4. Do transition programs maintain on-going communications with the business community?
7.5. Are business contacts maintained as a network of possible job opportunities?
7.6. Is there community service to assist students to locate appropriate community resources?

Goal 8: Job placements are of sufficient quantity and quality to meet student transition needs.

8.1. Are a variety of work environments available to support the needs of the individual student?
8.2. Is on-site work experience a component of the secondary program?
8.3. Is off-site work experience a component of the secondary program?
8.4. Is the opportunity for participation in a variety of job areas provided through co-

operative educational programs?

8.5. Is the support provided in work opportunities appropriate, based upon students' needs?

Goal 9: Transition programs employ follow-up procedures to evaluate students' adjustment to community living.

9.1. Is follow-up conducted in order to assess program effectiveness?

9.2. Are transition programs regularly modified based upon follow-up information?

9.3. Are handicapped students who dropped out of school followed up on a regular basis?

9.4. Do handicapped students who have enrolled in transition programs have more successful placements than those who have not been enrolled?

9.5. Is follow-up conducted in order to assess student adjustment to the community?

Goal 10: Transition programs provide for the placement of students in post-secondary education facilities.

10.1. Are handicapped students who have completed transition programs placed in vocational/technical institutes?

10.2. Are handicapped students who have completed transition programs placed in colleges and universities?

Goal 11: Transition program graduates achieve successful employment and community living.

11.1. Do graduates obtain employment within one year of graduation from transition programs?

11.2. Do graduates maintain employment?

11.3. Do graduates spend a maximum percent of time employed?

11.4. Are graduates employed in jobs commensurate with their abilities and handicapping conditions?

11.5. Do graduates demonstrate successful community adjustment?

The next task of the Stakeholder group was to identify the most appropriate sources of information for each of the evaluation questions. It was important that each evaluation question be addressed through two or more sources in order to increase validity of the information being collected.

The following classes of individuals provided data:

Teacher/Instructors - Vocational Education
Regular Education
Special Education

Guidance Counselors

Psychologists - School Psychologists
Clinical/Counseling Psychologists

Transition Program Consultants

School Nurses

Job Supervisors

Administrators - Regular Education
Special Education
Cooperative Vocational Education
Regional Vocational School Directors

Parents

Students

State Agency Staff

Private Agency Staff

Post-Secondary Staff

Admissions Personnel -Vocational/Technical Institutes
Colleges/Universities/Jr.
Colleges

With the base of necessary information determined and the data sources identified, project staff began Phase II of the project, the development of the evaluation system.

Phase II

Phase II of the project consisted of activities relevant to the development, field test and revision of the evaluation system.

Based upon the data sources identified in Phase I, a number of evaluation instruments were created. These included parent surveys, staff surveys, and structured interview protocols for parents, students, and staff.

Instrument items were derived from the evaluation questions and were assigned to at least two of the instruments based upon the appropriateness of data source as indicated in Phase I. To the extent possible a common metric was used in each of the instruments to facilitate triangulation of data from various instruments regarding a given evaluation question.

Following the development of the necessary instruments, an evaluation manual outlining procedures and policies was created. The manual and instruments were reviewed and edited by project staff and the stakeholder group. Three representative LEAs were selected to field test the evaluation manual and instruments. Individuals from each of the districts attended a full-day training session designed to prepare them to conduct a self-evaluation. Local evaluations were conducted in December, 1986.

Participants in the field test were called together on January 4, 1987 for a debriefing session during which the evaluation system was modified. The primary difficulty encountered during the field test was encouraging parents to return surveys. The field testers recommended that parent input be solicited through the use of a structured interview. A procedure was developed along with an accompanying protocol, and the manual was revised to reflect these changes. The evaluation system was further edited, and a final printing was completed.

A stratified random sample of 50 LEAs was selected to participate in the statewide evaluation. To arrive at a representative sample, all LEAs were stratified by type of administrative structure (Union, Private, Independent, SAD, or CSD) and classification (Urban, suburban, or rural). A random selection process was used within these strata. Fifty districts were selected. Letters were forwarded to the chief administrative officer of each district, describing the project, stressing its importance, and requesting cooperation and participation.

Training materials were developed for an inservice training program for the LEA staff that were chosen to participate in the statewide evaluation of transition.

Phase III

As the project entered Phase III, a revised evaluation manual and instruments were prepared for distribution to the sites who would participate in the state-wide evaluation. Participants were asked to attend one of four training sessions scheduled in different parts of the state.

Training was conducted for three representatives from each LEA. One team member per district received a copy of the manual prior to each training session, and this individual was asked to share the material with his or her team members. In the morning session, project goals, participant expectations/requirements and projected timelines were discussed. The afternoon session included intensive training in the use of the model and materials. The training was viewed as "application level" training, i.e., participants needed to leave the session prepared to implement the evaluation system virtually the next day. Though technical assistance was provided, participants were informed that their primary resources were the manual, the integrity of their knowledge of the model, and copies of the instruments.

At the termination of the training, participants were given final copies of the evaluation materials and were asked to conduct district self-evaluations. The names and phone numbers of project staff were made available to provide technical assistance.

Participants were asked to submit their evaluation data by May 18, 1987.

In mid April, participants were contacted by letter and by telephone to determine if they were in need of further assistance. Prior to the deadline for submission of data, participants were once again contacted to ensure that evaluations were progressing on schedule. Twenty-one of the districts completed the evaluation within project timelines.

Data Collection

The self-evaluation was conducted through information gathered by three types of instruments. These included surveys, structured interviews, and a policy review.

Survey Instruments. The survey instruments were designed to measure the extent to which professional staff felt that transition programs are effective. Two forms of the survey were developed to tailor the instrument to staff both within and outside the district. The survey was distributed to all professional personnel who encounter students in transition programs.

Structured Interviews. The structured interview was designed to obtain information from a variety of respondents with as little bias as possible. Interviewers were instructed to allow the interviewees as much latitude as possible in discussing their own programs. The purpose

of this qualitative instrument was to ensure that all important programmatic aspects were discussed. This data collection procedure was used to gather information from parents, students, former students, and a sample of staff members.

Policy Review. Because program effectiveness is often linked to official policy, the policy review was intended to gather information about current practices in transition services. The policy review was completed by an individual who is knowledgeable in all aspects of the program. Bearing in mind that all activities are not necessarily included in official policy, the instrument was designed to determine if procedures of any kind regarding each goal area were in place. A second function of the instrument was to determine if each goal is appropriate for the program and to identify additional goals that may be important.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires and interviews were analyzed and summarized for the following:

1. Surveys:
   Staff I Special Education and Voc-Ed Teachers
   Staff II Regular Education Teachers, administrators, and off-site personnel

2. Interviews:
   Staff I and II
   Current Special Education Students
   Graduate or former Special Education Students
   Parents

3. Policy Reviews: District Administrators

Each item in every questionnaire or interview makes a statement about the Maine special education program, and the respondent is asked to agree or disagree with the statement. All of the statements are worded positively, so that agreement with it reflects approval of the program characteristic being described. Analysis of these responses concentrates on the percentage of respondents who agreed or approved of the characteristic and on the percentage of respondents who did not know about or respond to the item.

The percentage of agreement or approval was based on the number of valid responses to the item. For example, if 40% of 100 respondents did not respond or checked "Don't Know" to item 1, and 50% approved, then only 30 respondents (or 30%) approved because the 50% is based only upon the 60 who agreed or disagreed.

Staff surveys I and II have several items related to each of the eleven evaluation goal areas. The percentage of agreement to Goal Area 1 is based on the total number of positive responses to Items 1 and 2, and on the total number of valid responses to these items.

To summarize responses across the six survey groups, unweighted averages were used for all reported statistics. This method allows each group to have equal impact on the overall results.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation data were obtained from the self-evaluations of 21 local districts. This sample includes 18% of the LEAs in the state.

A total of 1,115 persons responded to one of the six surveys or interviews. Eight hundred ninety-seven of these were from staff, and 236 were from students or parents. The number of respondents varied widely across districts, from a 13 to over 100. In eight of the districts, one or more of the response groups was not represented. These non-respondent groups tended most frequently to be parents or students. The wide variation in response group sizes was the reason the summary statistics weighted each group equally.

As a means of organizing the data collected, the remainder of this chapter will discuss the findings in relation to each goal of transition. In order to accurately interpret the survey results, it is important to consider the number of respondents who were able to answer a question in relation to the percent who responded "don't know" to a particular question. The data indicate that the majority of respondents were familiar with the program features described in goals 1 to 6 and 8. Less than half of the respondents indicated knowledge of goals 7, 9, 10, and 11.

Goal 1. Transition programs provide timely referral and appropriate placement consistent with student needs.

Respondents expressed satisfaction with the extent to which their LEA was addressing this goal. Students seemed most satisfied (87% positive) while staff responses were slightly less flattering (58% for Staff1 and 59% for Staff2). The policy review indicated that 94% of the reviewers found this goal to be appropriate. While procedures to address the goal were in place in 70% of the LEAs, a formal policy existed in only 18% of the districts. Eleven percent of the respondents indicated that no policy or procedure was present.

Goal 2. Assessment practices are comprehensive and appropriate.

Nearly half (44%) of the respondents did not have sufficient knowledge to answer the questions relating to this goal. As expected, more internal staff, parents, and students responded to this goal than external staff. By

the nature of their positions as line staff and consumer the former groups have a more direct experience with assessment practices.

All groups indicated satisfaction with the extent to which this goal was being addressed. However, parents and students were more satisfied than were in-district staff. Policy review indicated that 94% of the reviewers determined the goal to be important for their transition program. While 76% had implemented procedures pertinent to this goal, 18% noted that they had implemented policy.

Goal 3. Transition programs involve interagency collaboration in order to maximize program effectiveness.

Of the 53% who answered items about this goal, 64% responded positively about the LEAs' relevant practices. There was little variation among groups. The policy review indicated that all reviewers found this goal appropriate to their district. Implemented procedures pertinent to this goal were found in 82% of the districts.

Goal 4. Transition programs provide vocational and pre-vocational training through the use of functional curricula.

Approximately two-thirds (66%) of the respondents agreed that this goal was being appropriately addressed in their district. There was wide variation in the responses of the different groups. Special education staff indicated 49% agreement, while students and parents responded 77% and 78% agreement, respectively. Policy review indicated that the goal was appropriate to 88% of the programs. Implemented procedures were found in 70% of the districts. Eighteen percent reported that they had implemented policies with respect to goal 4.

Goal 5. Transition programs encourage active parent involvement.

Nearly two-thirds of the sample (65%) responded positively to items relating to goal 5. There was little variation among the different groups with the exception of the student sample, which reported 52% agreement. Policy review indicated that 18% of the districts have no policy or procedure relating to goal 5 while 70% reported implemented procedures.

Goal 6. Transition programs encourage active student involvement.

Response to this goal ranged from 61% agreement in Staff1 survey to 88% agreement in the staff interviews. Combined responses indicated 74% agreement. While 100% of the policy reviewers felt that the goal was appropriate, only 6% indicated that they had implemented policy. Eighty-two percent indicated implemented procedures.

Goal 7. Transition programs encourage active community involvement.

The majority of the respondents (52%) were not able to report about this goal. Of the respondents, however, all staff reported lower agreement with the manner in which this goal was addressed in their LEA than did the parents and students.

Seventy-six percent of the reviewers noted that the goal was appropriate, though over half (53%) indicated that no policy or procedure was in place in their district.

Goal 8. Job placements are of sufficient quantity and quality to meet student transition needs.

Combined responses indicated 42% agreement (range of 31% to 53%) that their districts were adequate in goal area 8. The majority of respondents did not agree that job placements in their districts were of sufficient quantity and quality.

This goal was determined to be appropriate by the policy reviewers (76%), but 41% of these reviewers indicated that no policy or procedure was in place.

Goal 9. Transition programs employ follow-up procedures to evaluate students' adjustment to community living.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents reported no knowledge of goal achievement. Of the 37% who responded to the items relating to goal 9, range of agreement was from 23% (staff interview) to 64% (student interview), with a combined response of 41% agreement. Once again, the goal was determined to be appropriate by the policy reviewers (65%); yet 59% noted that no policy or procedure existed.

Goal 10. Transition programs provide for the placement of students in post-secondary education facilities.

Of the 40% who responded knowledgeably to this item, combined responses indicated 60% agreement. Wide variation was noted among respondent groups from a low of 43% agreement (Staff2 interview) to a high of 77% agreement (Student interview). The goal was noted to be appropriate in the policy review (76%), but less than half (47%) had implemented procedure. Twenty-nine percent had no policy or procedure, and 18% reported procedures that were not yet implemented.

Goal 11. Transition program graduates achieve successful employment and community living.

More of the respondents (69%) lacked knowledge about this goal area than any of the preceding goals. Those who did respond knowledgeably indicated 60% agreement. There was wide variation between survey and interview responses. Average interview response indicated 37% agreement as compared to 72% average agreement on the survey responses. Ninety-four percent of the reviewers indicated that this goal was appropriate to the LEA. Eleven percent indicated that they had procedures that were not yet implemented while 47% indicated no policy or procedure.

Overall, the response rate and high percentage of "Don't Know" responses is consistent with a major finding of the study. Transition services tend not to be provided through consistent, planned programs.

From the initial survey conducted in Phase I and from personal contact with all invited participants, it appears that the terminology used in the literature has not found its way into common use in the LEAs in Maine. Further, while most districts recognize the need and provide some programs to prepare special education students for post-graduation living, many do not conduct these activities as part of a transition initiative. In fact, it was not even universally agreed that such activities are within the purview of educational programming.

Care should be taken in the interpretation of data relating to program areas in which most respondents indicated a lack of familiarity. While this may be due to the limited knowledge of the individuals polled, such occurrences may also be due to a lack of programming in these areas. Students expressed the most satisfaction with program referral procedures and the least satisfaction with the quantity and quality of job placements. Parents concurred with these opinions, also rating student involvement as a program strength and

follow-up as an area with which they were not satisfied. In contrast, staff expressed greatest satisfaction in the area of parent involvement. While community involvement and the successful preparation of students for community living were the areas with the lowest amount of satisfaction, it must be noted that less than half of the staff felt that they were able to answer these questions.

In general, parents and students responded more positively about the LEAs achievement of specific transition goals than did staff. While this reflects consumer satisfaction with district programs, it should be remembered that staff are probably in a better position to evaluate program efficiency and effectiveness.

It seems that those program components that have been stressed in special education have been successfully generalized to transition programs. Referral and assessment practices, interagency collaboration, use of functional curricula, and active participation of parents and students are program components that have been popularized through the special education initiative. Aspects that are unique to transition programs such as community involvement, quantity and quality of job placements, student follow-up, post-secondary educational placements, and adjustment to community living were not as successfully implemented. Further, a smaller number of respondents had information about these activities.

As part of the evaluation procedure, the director of special education in each district conducted a review of transition program policy. The reviewer was also asked to rate whether or not each transition goal was appropriate. All goals were rated as appropriate by at least 76% of the reviewers with the exception of Goal 9 (65%). Goal 9 concerned follow-up of community adjustment. Despite the determination that the goals were appropriate, very few LEAs had established policies. Most, however, had procedures to address goals 1 to 6 (range 70% to 82%). In those cases where interview and survey data indicated that program performance was weakest, there tended not to be regularly implemented policies or procedures (goals 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11). The top four districts with respect to overall participant satisfaction (>70% agreement) report all goals to be appropriate and also indicate implemented procedures pertinent to the achievement of these goals. All of the top districts consider goals 1 to 8 to be appropriate for transition programs, three of the four consider goals 9 and 11 to be appropriate, and two consider goal 10 to be appropriate. All of these districts report that they have implemented procedures for all of the goals considered to be appropriate to their district.

As overall agreement with goal attainment decreases, there seems to be a decrease in the level of implemented procedure.

The four lowest districts (<40% agreement) did not respond to the policy review instrument. Project staff speculate that this may reflect a lack of procedures for transition programs in these districts.

As a measure of program success, the work histories of recent graduates were analyzed. When graduate student employment histories were examined, quality and quantity of job opportunities seemed limited although these were generally consistent with regional characteristics. Students who had graduated reported the need for more post secondary training and educational opportunities and that the majority of their job referrals came through family and friends. Even though the sample of students was relatively small, it does seem representative of what is happening around the state. These findings reveal the most significant insights into the effectiveness of transition.

In order to determine if the administrative structure of a district was related to the success of its transition programs, the respondent LEAs were grouped by type of structure. Specific administrative structures included Unions, CSDs, Independents, and SADs. While there was much scatter between individual districts in relation to the level of achievement of specific goals, there was no discernible pattern as a function of the administrative structure of the LEA.

Analyses conducted by handicapping condition revealed that staff working with the mildly or moderately retarded responded most positively (>60%) to their district's endeavors in the areas of referral, parent involvement, and quality and quantity of job placements. Teachers of the severely retarded responded most favorably to assessment practices, vocational and prevocational training, parent involvement, student involvement, and follow-up. In general, teachers of severely retarded students reported the highest satisfaction. Staff working with the specific learning disabled and the emotionally disturbed agreed that districts were successful in addressing Goals 5 and 6. These goal areas include encouraging parent and student participation. In addition, staff involved with emotionally disturbed students reacted positively to LEA attempts to provide for placement in post secondary education facilities.

Limitations

The findings of this project should be interpreted with the appropriate cautions imposed by limitations of the sample that participated, the methodology employed, and the very general focus of the study.

Sample

Although an original sample pool of 50 districts was selected through methods appropriate to choosing a stratified random sample, 21 districts actually contributed data for the statewide analysis. This represents nearly half of the sample population and 18% of the total number of districts in Maine. However, in a state where transition services have been a topic of concern and emphasis for a number of years, it was expected that participation would have been greater. LEAs who did not participate indicated the following reasons:

1. Many district representatives apparently felt that, even though a great deal of effort was spent reassuring them of confidentiality, this evaluation was threatening. They worried that they would be criticized for having ill-defined transition programs.

2. Some district representatives saw this evaluation as another aspect of the recent emphasis in education for district "accountability" and resented the intrusion.

3. Some district representatives saw this as the beginning of another state-mandated accounting process that would increase their paperwork.

4. State law and P.L. 94-142 already mandate monitoring of Special Education programs. This evaluation was perceived as additional, unnecessary monitoring.

Methods

Difficulties in the collection of data were reported by several districts. The reporting of incomplete data can also be considered to limit the interpretations of the results of this evaluation. The following comments represent difficulties confronted by LEAs:

1. Some of the respondents felt that they had insufficient staff and staff time available to participate in this evaluation.

2. Respondents from some districts felt that the evaluation procedures were too cumbersome. The self-evaluation format required a lot of effort on the part of the local evaluation coordinator. Interviews, in particular, were found to be very time consuming.

3. Communication between project staff and local evaluators was not felt to be adequate. This seems to indicate the need for project staff to spend more time at the local sites or for the local evaluation cadre to receive more evaluation training. Implementation of the system developed for this project as a self-evaluation may not be appropriate for many districts.

Focus

Several of the problems voiced by district representatives who participated in the training and the evaluation revolve around the development of the priorities and focus of the evaluation. These include:

1. Many of the local district representatives felt that they were not sufficiently involved in the development of the evaluation focus, methods, or procedures. The Stakeholder committee that established the priorities of the evaluation and the goals to be addressed didn't have sufficient input from local personnel. Many interests were represented, but apparently, the ties to local needs and priorities were not sufficiently developed.

2. Concern was raised that individuals on the stakeholder committee may have tended to represent personal beliefs rather than the convictions of their constituent groups.

It should be noted that these factors are limitations of participation in school evaluation in general and not simply characteristic of Maine. Nevertheless, with the above considerations in mind, a number of districts chose not to participate in this voluntary evaluation effort.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a summary of project findings:

1. The goals of transition that are relevant and important within the state of Maine have been identified.

2. An evaluation system and instrumentation has been developed which will allow longitudinal analysis of program progress.

3. A significant number of LEAs in the state are not addressing transition needs in a formalized way. In addition, the terminology is not standardized, and agreement is lacking as to the exact responsibility of the schools.

4. Those program components that have been developed as part of the special education initiative seem to be successful in transition programs. These include referral and assessment practices, interagency collaboration, use of functional curricula, and active participation of parents and students.

5. Program components that are unique to transition programs such as community involvement, quantity and quality of job placements, student follow-up, post-secondary educational placements, and adjustment to community living were not as successfully implemented.

6. Formal transition policy is significantly absent. Procedures were in place for those activities stated in (4) above.

7. Neither policy nor procedures were significantly evident for program components which address community involvement, quantity and quality of job placements, student follow-up, post-secondary educational placements, and adjustment to community living.

8. In relation to type of handicap, the data resulting from this study indicate wide variation across areas of specialty. However, due to the small number of respondents in some groups, meaningful interpretation of these data is not practical.

9. When former students' employment histories were examined, quality and quantity of job opportunities seemed limited, although these were generally consistent with regional characteristics.

10. Students who had graduated reported the need for more post-secondary training and educational opportunities and that the majority of their job referrals came through family and friends.

11. While there is much scatter in the level of achievement of specific goals among individual districts, there was no discernible pattern as a function of administrative structure.

12. In those cases where performance was weakest as determined by surveys and instruments, there tended not to be regularly implemented policies or procedures.

13. Regarding the identification of effective districts, it seems that those LEAs with successful programs have formalized policies and procedures which address each of the goals of transition. A direct relationship between program quality and the existence of regularly implemented policy and procedures was found.

Considering the project findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. An intensive preservice and inservice program for LEA personnel is required to provide a common base of knowledge regarding the role of the schools in transition programming.

2. The State should establish a compendium of recommended LEA policies and procedures which address each goal of transition. LEAs could modify these as necessary. Particular attention should be given to those goals that are unique to transition. Further, attention should be given to the formal integration of transition policies and procedures within the special education program.

3. It is imperative that LEA plans be developed to increase the quality and quantity of job opportunities for special education students who have graduated from school. This should be a major initiative for SEA technical assistance.

4. It is equally essential that a plan be developed to increase the availability of post-secondary educational opportunities for special education students.

5. The State should develop a plan to identify and publicize promising practices in transition programming.

6. There is also the need for increased coordination of efforts at the state and local levels to bring cohesion to the development of the transition initiative.

7. The SEA should encourage LEAs to use P.L.94-142 funds to supplement the development of transition programs by funding program components that have not been included in the local budget.

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